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SUBJECT: FIRST-EVER INDIAN PM VISIT TO QATAR AIMS TO SPARK
BETTER TIES

Classified By: Ambassador Joseph E. LeBaron, for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

(C) KEY POINTS

-- In follow-up to PM Singh's November 9-11 visit, the Qatar Foundation is considering India's offer to locate a "prestigious Indian university" at Education City outside of Doha. India is also preparing to host Qatari investors in January in a visit primarily aimed at infrastructure development.

-- India had hoped to sign a new agreement that would bolster its imports of natural gas from Qatar. Since long-term supplies are already contracted, the best India can do is set the stage for augmented supplies when they become available.

-- For the 400,000 plus Indians resident in Qatar, and other Indians who want to come here, the most tangible outcome was an agreement to establish a shared law enforcement database whose main objective is to satisfy Qatari officials on the criminal backgrounds of Indian visa applicants, thereby increasing India's competitive advantage for supplying labor.

-- Even though a maritime security agreement was signed, there are no plans for joint naval exercises any time soon. More imminent are military goodwill visits, exchanges of experts, and training programs.

(C) COMMENT

-- Implicit in the Indian diplomats' readout of the visit was the sense that India's lack of attention to Qatar (and tardiness in accepting the Amir's invitation to Doha) was hurting India in the competition to supply expatriate workers.

-- Another theme was that the Indian Embassy believed advancing India's chief objectives (bolstering natural gas supplies and attracting investment) would not happen absent good relations at the highest levels of government.

END KEY POINTS AND COMMENT.

¶1. (C) In a November 17 meeting with P/E Chief, Indian Embassy Political Officer Harish Arora, joined later by Political and Commercial Affairs Head Sanjiv Kohli, shared their perspective on Indian PM Manmohan Singh's November 9-11 visit to Qatar, where Singh met with Amir Hamid bin Khalifa Al Thani and Prime Minister PM Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani. According to Kohli, the Amir of Qatar had twice visited India, in 1998 and 2005. Since the latter visit, an invitation had been pending from the Amir for the Indian PM to visit Doha. Kohli and Arora said the visit to Qatar, long overdue, was the first by an Indian PM and aimed to solidify

the bilateral relationship.

12. (C) According to Kohli, an outcome of the 2005 visit by the Amir to India was the establishment of a joint committee to guide the development of relations between the two countries. It never met. Kohli said combating this "lethargy" in the relationship was the primary aim of the visit. He added that as a result of the Singh's visit to Doha, the joint committee formed in 2005 will soon begin holding meetings. Arora noted that the secondary objective of the visit was to broaden and deepen relationships in the educational and commercial sectors. More than 400,000 Indians live in Qatar (the country's largest expatriate community). Higher education costs in Qatar for Indian residents are out of reach; most parents send their children back to India for university. During the PM's visit, discussions were held on establishing a "prestigious Indian university presence" at Education City (where other universities, including a handful from the U.S., are located). The Qatar Foundation is considering India's proposal.

COMMERCE AND TRADE

13. (C) Turning to commercial ties, Arora said only a couple of Indian businessmen accompanied Singh to Doha, and no new business deals were agreed on this trip. Singh made a push for Qatari investment in India, especially in the construction of infrastructure. Kohli added that the one commercial take-away from the visit was an agreement for

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India to receive a trade delegation in January of potential Qatari investors. Indian officials are now preparing a list of projects to show the visitors in order to entice investment, mainly in infrastructure. Kohli pointed out that even in the absence of a political push from New Delhi, trade between India and Qatar has grown by about 20 percent per year in recent years. One tangible example of this growth is that Qatar Airways now flies non-stop to 11 different Indian destinations, with most flights lasting about three hours.

14. (C) Although Indian would have liked to have signed an agreement in Doha increasing natural gas exports from Qatar to India, Arora said it is clear that Qatar has no more gas to offer. Everything is tied up in long-term contracts. Nonetheless, he added that one goal of solidifying the bilateral relationship is to lay the ground work for additional natural gas shipments to India in the future, when Qatar's supply capacity increases. Currently, according to Arora, India imports 7.5 million tons of LNG per annum under a 25-year agreement, signed in 1990.

LABOR

15. (C) Arora said resident Indians had been exerting pressure for a visit by the PM after watching senior officials from other big labor-supplying countries visit Qatar over recent months to sign labor-related agreements. Perhaps the most tangible result of Singh's visit for the Indian community was an agreement to establish a security and law enforcement database. The main advantage of the database is that it will allow Qatari immigration officials to clear pending visa applications from Indian nationals more quickly. In the competition among labor supplying countries, this was no small achievement. Arora hinted that Qatari officials, once the database is up and running, will be able to check criminal and other records of potential Indian workers instantaneously, giving Indians an advantage in the work visa competition.

MILITARY

¶6. (C) Asked about press reports noting a significant military agreement, Arora said the agreement would pave the way for military goodwill visits, exchanges of experts, and training programs. He downplayed its significance as reported by the press, implying that its major pillar -- maritime security cooperation -- was more symbolic than substantive. Arora stressed that maritime security cooperation may lead to joint naval exercises in the future, but such exercises were a possibility, and not a reality, for now.

LeBaron